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By Mr. T O W N,
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— — — — — *Alea quando*
Hos animos? — — — Juv.



HERE needs no apology to my readers for making the following letter the entertainment of to-day: I shall therefore only assure the ingenious correspondent that favoured me with it, that if it had not been accidentally mislaid, it would not have remained so long unnoticed.

To Mr. T O W N.

S I R,

YOUR frequent ridicule of the several branches of Gaming has given me great pleasure: I could only wish that you had completed the design by drawing at large the portrait of a Gamester. This, since you omitted it, I have ventured to undertake; and while your papers on this

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subject serve as a counter-treatise to that of *Hoyle* on Whist, Back-gammon, &c. my rough draught of the professors of these arts may tend to illustrate the work, and stand as properly in the frontispiece as the Knave of Clubs at the door of a cardmaker.

THE whole tribe of Gamesters may be ranked under two divisions: every man who makes carding, dicing, and betting his daily practice is either a Dupe or a Sharper, two characters equally the objects of envy and admiration. The Dupe is generally a person of great fortune and weak intellects,

“ Who will as tenderly be led by th’ nose

“ As asses are,”

SHAKESPEAR.

He plays, not that he has any delight in cards or dice, but because it is the fashion; and if whist or hazard are proposed, he will no more refuse to make one at the table, than among a set of hard drinkers he would object drinking his glass in turn, because he is not dry.

THERE are some few instances of men of sense, as well as family and fortune, who have been dupes and bubbles. Such an unaccountable itch of play has seized them that they have sacrificed every thing to it, and have seemed wedded to seven’s the main, and the odd trick. There is not a more melancholy object than a gentleman of sense thus infatuated. He makes himself and family a prey to a gang of villains more infamous than highwaymen; and perhaps when his ruin is completed, he is glad to join with the very scoundrels that destroyed him, and live upon the spoils of others, whom he can draw into the same follies that proved so fatal to himself.

HERE we may take a survey of the character of a Sharper, and that he may have no room to complain of foul play,

play, let us begin with his excellencies. You will perhaps be startled, Mr. TOWN, when I mention the excellencies of a Sharper; but a Gamester who makes a decent figure in the world, must be endued with many amiable qualities, which would undoubtedly appear with great lustre, were they not eclipsed by the odious character affixed to his trade. In order to carry on the common business of his profession, he must be a man of quick and lively parts, attended with a Stoical calmness of temper, and a constant presence of mind. He must smile at the loss of thousands, and is not to be discomposed, though ruin stares him in the face. As he is to live among the great, he must not want politeness and affability; he must be submissive, but not servile; he must be master of an ingenuous liberal air, and have a seeming openness of behaviour.

THESE must be the chief accomplishments of our Hero: but lest I should be accused of giving too favourable a likeness of him, now we have seen his outside, let us take a view of his heart. There we shall find avarice the main spring that moves the whole machine. Every Gamester is eaten up with avarice, and when this passion is in full force, it is more strongly predominant than any other. It conquers even lust; and conquers it more effectually than age. At sixty we look at a fine woman with pleasure: but when cards and dice have engrossed our attention, women and all their charms are slighted at five and twenty. A thorough Gamester renounces *Venus* and *Cupid* for *Plutus* and *Amsace*, and owns no mistress of his heart except the Queen of Trumps. His insatiable avarice can only be gratified by hypocrisy; so that all those specious virtues already mentioned, and which, if real, might be turned to the benefit of mankind, must be directed in a Gamester towards the destruction of his fellow-creatures. His quick and lively parts

parts are only to instruct and assist him in the most dextrous method of packing the cards and cogging the dice : his fortitude, which enables him to lose thousands without emotion, must often be practised against the stings and reproaches of his own conscience ; and his liberal deportment and affected openness is only to recommend and conceal the blackest villainy.

IT is now necessary to take a second survey of his heart, and as we have seen it's vices let us consider it's miseries. The covetous man who has not sufficient courage or inclination to encrease his fortune by bets, cards, or dice, but is contented to hoard up his thousands by thefts less public, or by cheats less liable to uncertainty, lives in a state of perpetual suspicion and terror ; but the avaritious fears of the Gamester, are infinitely greater. He is constantly to wear a mask, and like *Monsieur St. Croix*, coadjutor to that famous *empoisonneuse Madame Brinvillier*, if his mask falls off, he runs the hazard of being suffocated by the stench of his own poisons. I have seen some examples of this sort, not many years ago at *White's*. I am uncertain whether the wretches are still alive, but if they are, they breathe like toads under ground, crawling amidst old walls, and paths long since unfrequented.

BUT supposing that the Sharper's hypocrisy remains undetected, in what a state of mind must that man be whose fortune depends upon the insincerity of his heart, the dissingenuity of his behaviour, and the false bias of his dice ? What sensations must he suppress when he is obliged to smile, although he is provoked : when he must look serene in the height of despair, and when he must act the Stoic, without the consolation of one virtuous sentiment, or one moral principle ? How unhappy must he be even in that

that situation, from which he hopes to reap most benefit? I mean, amidst stars, garters, and the various herds of nobility? Their lordships are not always in an humour for play: they chuse to laugh; they chuse to joke; in the mean while our hero must patiently await the good hour, and must not only join in the laugh, and applaud the jokes, but must humour every turn and caprice, to which that set of spoiled children called bucks of quality are liable. Surely his brother *Thicket's* employment of sauntering on horseback in the wind and rain till the *Reading* coach passes through *Smallberry-Green*, is the more eligible, and no less honest, occupation.

THE Sharper has also frequently the mortification of being thwarted in his designs. Opportunities of fraud will not for ever present themselves. The false die cannot be constantly produced, nor the packed cards perpetually be placed upon the table. It is then our gamester is in the greatest danger. But even then when he is in the power of fortune, and has nothing but meer luck and fair play on his side, he must stand the brunt, and perhaps give away his last guinea, as coolly as he would lend a nobleman a shilling.

OUR hero is now going off the stage, and his catastrophe is very tragical: the next news we hear of him is his death, atchieved by his own hand, and with his own pistol. An inquest is bribed, he is buried at midnight, and forgotten before sun-rise.

THESE two portraits of a Sharper, wherein I have endeavoured to shew different likenesses in the same man, puts me in mind of an old print, which I remember at

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Oxford,

Oxford, of Count *Guiscard*. At first sight he was exhibited in a full-bottom wig, a hat and feather, embroidered cloaths, diamond buttons, and the full court-dress of those days: but by pulling a string, the folds of the paper were shifted, the face only remained, a new body came forward, and Count *Guiscard* appeared to be a DEVIL.

I am, Sir,

Your most humble servant,

M. N.